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## Walking the Tightrope: Europe between Europeanisation and Globalisation

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## Europeanisation of the 'European' Values and the Emerging EU Image

Borislava Miteva

### Introduction

The 'West' has often been interpreted as the cultural 'centre' of Europe, and consequently has often been imitated by the 'periphery'.<sup>1</sup> History has been reconstructed in such a way that we tend to associate some of the most significant intellectual currents such as the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Positivism and Liberalism with 'Western civilization', thereby excluding the influences of other European and non-European cultures. As Neuman points out, the historical trajectory has rendered associations with the West as being dynamic and modern, while the East was seen as stagnant and backward.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in a period when members of both areas of Europe belong to the same polity, they most likely have an increased *mutual* impact on each other and on the image of the Community. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore the combined influence of the Western centre and the ex-communist periphery on the construction of the image of the present-day, enlarged European Union.

Following Behr's suggestion that "the historic terminology of 'civilization' turned into 'human rights', 'democracy', 'rule of law'..."<sup>3</sup> in the European Union, it is valuable to examine the emerging image in terms of the associated values and principles. The structuring role of the media and the political debates should not be neglected when it comes to the negotiation of the Community's worldview. Yet, here the focus is on the self-representation of the EU, based on the Copenhagen criteria, the Constitutional Treaty

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<sup>1</sup> Jerzy Jedlicki, "East-European Historical Bequest En Route to an Integrated Europe," in *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement*, ed. Eder Klaus and Willfried Spohn (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Iver Neuman, "European Identity, EU Expansion, and the Integration/Exclusion Nexus," *Alternatives* 23 (1998): 404.

<sup>3</sup> Harmut Behr, "The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Comparative Perspective," *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (2007): 254.

and the Treaty of Lisbon, while in turn I also look at public opinion statistics obtained from the *Eurobarometer* database. The purpose of this undertaking is to better understand the discursive impact of the three EU documents in terms of the institutionalisation of the ‘European’<sup>4</sup> values, and the extent to which these are internalised by the citizens of the EU, thereby linking the image construction at the state level to the image reinforcement at the public level. As one of the newest<sup>5</sup> and most peripheral member states, Bulgaria is taken as a case study, which is compared to the ‘core EU’ with regards to the significance of the European values and their relation to the image of the polity.

It is worth keeping in mind that the image of the Community is contingent on external interpretations (those of the ‘out-group’ members) as well,<sup>6</sup> since from a social constructivist perspective identities are relational and context-based.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in order to trace the interaction among the European centre and periphery, and on the other hand the degree of a converging perception of the Union’s image, this research is focused on the *self*-understanding of and by the Community itself.

## **Evaluating theories and theorising about values**

In terms of European integration, the constructivist approach emphasises the interaction between many actors: the supranational and the national political elite, the international players, NGOs and the media. In such a dynamic context, nothing is fixed – the interests and ideas of the actors are mutually constitutive of one another, and are thus subject to constant moulding.<sup>8</sup> One of the weaknesses of the approach is its overall disregard for the economic interests of the member states; on the contrary, extensive attention is paid to the role of ideas and norms, which develop within the supranational structures.<sup>9</sup> In accordance with constructivism, significance can be attached to the various actors in the

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<sup>4</sup> These are operationalized as the values explicitly stated by the three EU documents.

<sup>5</sup> Bulgaria (together with Romania) did not join the EU until 2007, while the majority of the Central Eastern European candidate states became members in 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Lorenzo Fioramonti and Sonia Lucarelli, “How do the Others See Us? European Political Identity and the External Image of the EU,” in *The Search for a European Identity*, ed. Furio Cerutti and Sonia Lucarelli (London: Routledge, 2008), 193-210.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Bache and Stephen George eds., “Critical Perspectives,” in *Politics in the European Union* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 43-46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

shaping of the EU image, but as mentioned, the research is concerned with the EU documents and the public opinion within the member states. Yet, since the aim is to explore the *implicit* nature of this image, that is to say the values (i.e. ideas) associated with the Union, while excluding the impact of its policies (i.e. behaviour), the constructivist approach seems to be an appropriate tool. Firstly, the epistemological branch of constructivism is used for analysing the discursive influence of the documents with regards to the EU image at the state level. Secondly, the resulting legal and cognitive scaffold is interpreted as a socialisation factor at the public level. In a sense, whereas the legal texts express the European values, the European citizens attach emotions to them and internalise them to a different extent, thereby reinforcing and re-shaping the self-representation of the Community.

While the constructivist approach is the tool for discourse analysis at both levels involved in the EU-image construction, the overall motif of the paper, namely the double-arrowed influence between the periphery and the centre, stems from the so called neo-medieval empire paradigm. According to Zielonka, the European Union is far from similar to the Westphalian centralised state; rather it is characterised by multiple allegiances, fragmented authority and joined decision-making.<sup>10</sup> Analogically, when examining the Union's image, I focus on the *joined construction*-making by the periphery and the centre, which shapes the self-understanding of the Community as a "civilian rather than a military power".<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the author, however, I place myself even further away from the normative approach<sup>12</sup> in that I emphasise the *interdependence* between the principle and the newer member states, while looking at the emerging image of the EU. Moreover, whereas Zielonka argues that the development of a pan-European identity is impeded by the polycentric nature of the Union,<sup>13</sup> I suggest that such a process is rather a matter of time. If the European citizens, from both the centre and the periphery of the Community, are socialised within the same political and cognitive framework,

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<sup>10</sup> Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Ian Manners, "The Normative Ethics of the European Union," *International Affairs* 84 (2008): 45-60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 166.

there should be an increased commonality in their political orientations, thus stimulating the emergence of a collective political identity. As advocated by Cerutti, the prospect of a European political identity is related to “what citizens and elites *perceive* as shared values and principles through the process of self-identification”.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, even when it comes to sensitive issues such as abortion, it has been proposed that horizontal Europeanisation plays a role, since the socialisation and mobility of people within the same polity leads to a moderate tendency of convergence in the civic value system.<sup>15</sup> Following this logic, when it comes to the image of the EU and the values associated with it, there should be a greater degree of commonality among the European citizens, as it is not only inclined by the increased mobility and interaction, but also by the institutionalisation of the ‘common values’ of the Union, and the reinforcement by the political elite, the media and the discourse in the public sphere.

### **Foundations of the EU image: institutionalisation of ‘European’ values**

Economic integration has historically been the main objective of the Union, but since the Treaty of Maastricht, the evaluation of the polity does not depend simply on economic outputs, but also on democratic criteria.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, since the 1970s until the present, a pattern has been observed, where the representation of the Union has been initially based on the economic performance, followed by associations with symbols, and finally with values,<sup>17</sup> related to the democratic criteria (for example, democracy, equality, solidarity). In the words of Sadurski, “the EU increasingly becomes a community of values, not merely a community of interests”,<sup>18</sup> and consistent with this trend there have been more references to the values and principles adhered to by the Community. Carrying

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<sup>14</sup> Furio Cerutti, “Why Political Identity and Legitimacy Matter in the European Union,” in *The Search for a European Identity*, ed. Furio Cerutti and Sonia Lucarelli (London: Routledge, 2008), 4. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> P. Kutzer, “Market Integration and the Mobility of People: Europeanization of Values and Beliefs,” in *Globalisation of the European Political Economy*, ed. Steven Weber (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Dieter Fuchs and Andrea Schlenker, “European Identity and the Legitimacy of the EU” (paper presented at the II Work package V Conference, Lodz, Poland, March-April 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Cristiano Bee, “The ‘Institutionally Constructed’ European Identity: Citizenship and Public Sphere Narrated by the Commission,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9 (2008): 446.

<sup>18</sup> Wojciech Sadurski, “Accession’s Democracy Dividend: The Impact of the EU Enlargement upon Democracy in the New MemberStates of Central and Eastern Europe,” *European Law Journal* 10 (2004): 400.

on the idea of interaction between the centre and the periphery, it is not hard to envision how their combined image construction is embodied by the media representations of the EU. Yet, taking a step backward, to the legal texts that provide one of the bases for media attention, the importance of the periphery has been largely neglected. Consequently, it is important to better understand its role in the process of institutionalisation of the European values and the resulting EU image.

### *Copenhagen criteria*

The Copenhagen membership criteria were developed in 1993 in order to provide objective standards against which the candidate states were to be measured. Incorporated in one of the political conditions, namely the requirement for “stable institutions”,<sup>19</sup> there were explicit references to values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, and respect for minorities’ rights. Many scholars have examined diverse aspects of the influence of the centre on the periphery during the accession process,<sup>20</sup> but what I would like to point out here is the significance of the legal text for the provisions’ suppliers themselves. Assuming that before the Eastern Enlargement the ex-communist states were seen as the ‘others’, the EU member states were defining themselves in relation to the former. By stating the conditions required for joining the ‘club’, the existing members were in parallel labelling their own European characteristics and the values to which they adhered. Accordingly, the Copenhagen criteria provided the EU not only with a tool for a more objective measurement of the candidates, but also contributed to the construction of the Community’s image and social reality. In the words of Lucarelli, discourse does not only “limit the space for manoeuvre of those who use it (as in the case of EU enlargement, Schimmelfennig 2003), but it can even change their very interests and self-

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<sup>19</sup> Eneko Landaburu, “The Need for Enlargement and Differences from Previous Accessions,” in *The Accession Story: The EU from 15 to 25 Countries*, ed. George Vassiliou (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 20.

<sup>20</sup> See Frank Schimmelfennig, “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union,” *International Organization* 55 (2001); Harmut Behr, “The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Comparative Perspective,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (2007).

perception”.<sup>21</sup> Thus it would be rather one-sided to maintain that it was only the centre that had an impact on the image of the EU. After all, if there were no ‘outsiders’, the member states would not have had a reason for establishing the Copenhagen criteria and by doing so – defining themselves; this is precisely one of the traces of the “formative role”<sup>22</sup> of the Central Eastern European countries (CEECs). More importantly, by agreeing to the Copenhagen criteria, the latter were not just passive recipients of European norms – their re-*action* reinforced the representation of the EU, put forward by the centre. The image of the Union as a promoter of law and a civilian power evoked in the candidate states an association with a “community of values based on fairness, solidarity and equality between all European nations”.<sup>23</sup> Despite the idea that the European Union was probably the only logical solution to the candidates’ political and economic situation, the fact that they were willing to satisfy the membership requirements and to adopt the *acquis communautaire* was in itself a determining factor, as it contributed to the “strengthening of the European moral order”.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the prospect of inclusion to a shared European space, especially so for actors who have for long been excluded,<sup>25</sup> most likely strengthened the association of the EU with the constructed notion of a ‘community of values’.

### *Constitutional Treaty*

On the other hand, the Constitutional Treaty (2004) was intended to serve a very different function – it was to amend the existing pillar structure of the Union and to found a Constitution, thereby rendering the nature of the polity more comprehensive to the European citizens. Given its purpose, it was a prominent source of political negotiations

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<sup>21</sup> Sonia Lucarelli, “Values, Principles, Identity and European Union Foreign Policy,” in *Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy*, ed. Sonia Lucarelli and Ian Manners (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

<sup>22</sup> David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis eds., “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Marju Lauristin, “The European Public Sphere and the Social Imaginary of the ‘New Europe’,” *European Journal of Communication* 22 (2007): 402.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 406.

and public debate, and moreover it could be interpreted as a significant foundation of the European values and principles, as these were explicitly stated in Article I (2):

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.<sup>26</sup>

As explained on the European Union portal web page, via this articulation the Constitution included new values such as human dignity, equality, the rights of minorities and the “characterisation of the values upheld by the societies of the Member States”,<sup>27</sup> thus enriching the options of associations with the EU image. It would be tempting to deduct that the EU simply referred to universal values (similar to those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), although it is debatable whether such values are in fact ‘universal’ or not, where they originate and how they come about. In any case, the focus here is not on the nature of the values, but on the subjective interpretation and function. The Constitutional treaty contributed to the framing of the European values, by emphasising the fact that these were the founding blocks of the *European* Union, and that they were shared by all the *European* Member States. According to Stuart Hall, meaning is not fixed in the things *per se* – rather, it arises in the process of representation.<sup>28</sup> Thus, theoretically speaking, it does not even have to be true that the European Union was founded on the values and principles listed; the mere self-representation through the statement in question has an impact on the institutionalisation of the *European* values, while their constant evoking becomes an important aspect of the image of the EU. In this sense, following Howarth and Stavrakakis, Article I (2) could be interpreted as a constitutive element of the social reality that emerges thereafter.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the scholars suggest that meaning is contingent on the so called “nodal points” to which the

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<sup>26</sup> European Union, “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe,” *Official Journal of the European Union* C310 (2004): 11.

<sup>27</sup> Europa, “A Constitution for Europe: The Founding Principles of the Union,” posted on [http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/constitution/objectives_en.htm) (accessed 2 May 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE, 1997), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Howarth and Stavrakakis eds., “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” 3.



discourse is attached;<sup>30</sup> hence, the European Union becomes the reference point for the particular interpretation of the values and principles, to which the Constitutional Treaty refers. For example, Article I (3) of the treaty states that one of the aims of the Union was the “promotion of peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples”,<sup>31</sup> thereby linking the listed values to its objectives, or put otherwise, incorporating them into what the Union stands for and becomes associated with in the member states. In fact, similarly to the Copenhagen criteria, the sharing of the values referenced in the Constitutional Treaty would be a prerequisite for future member states, but furthermore, “failure by a Member State to respect these values may lead to the suspension of that Member State's rights deriving from membership of the Union (Article I [59])”.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while the Copenhagen criteria, in the long run led to a self-representation of the EU image by means of implicit labelling of the European characteristics, the Constitutional Treaty was purposefully aimed at both the centre and the periphery, as it was to provide a Constitution for all the European citizens, and by doing so to reinforce the existing image of the ‘community of values’. Despite the fact that the Treaty never entered into force, it had an impact on the social reality as its existence was in itself a basis for further discourse and interpretations by the media, the political elite and the public, especially since it was to become subject of scrutiny due to the referenda that followed in some of the member states.

### *Lisbon Treaty*

Conversely, the Treaty of Lisbon was recently ratified by all the twenty-seven current member states, thus “ending several years of negotiation about institutional issues”.<sup>33</sup> It was meant to modernise the EU institutions and consequently to diminish the suggested democratic deficit, while also rendering the external EU image more coherent, by means of the High Representative in Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who would speak with

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>31</sup> European Union, “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe,” *Official Journal of the European Union* C310 (2004): 11.

<sup>32</sup> European Union, “The Founding Principles of the Union,” European Union, [http://europa.eu/scadplus/european\\_convention/objectives\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/european_convention/objectives_en.htm)

<sup>33</sup> European Union, “Treaty of Lisbon: The Treaty at a Glance,” posted on [http://europa.eu/lisbon\\_treaty/glance/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/glance/index_en.htm) (accessed 2 May 2010).

one voice on behalf of the Community. In terms of the value-based aspect of the image, the Treaty of Lisbon referred to the same values, principles and objectives (Article 1a and Article 2)<sup>34</sup> as its rejected predecessor, thus once again reinforcing the idea of the EU as a promoter of law and human rights. This is further confirmed by the fact that it made legally binding the "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union".<sup>35</sup> Not only does the Charter lay out the particular articulations of dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights and justice, but it also highlights the importance of the commonality of these values in all the member states (similarly to the intended Constitution for Europe). As stated in the preamble, "The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values",<sup>36</sup> thereby having a discursive impact on both the centre and the periphery in terms of their prospect relation.

### **Reinforcement of the EU image: internalisation of 'European' values**

Upon examining the influence of three foundations for 'civilian power' constructions among both the central and the peripheral member states, I once again leave out the media representations, and this time go a step further, to the public opinion. Tamvaki correctly points out that considerable attention has been paid to the Union's socialisation tools such as agreements, screenings and the Commission's reports, while internalisation of the norms is usually taken for granted.<sup>37</sup> She goes on to suggest that when internalisation does take place, it usually affects the corporate level of the public and only later habituation reaches the "individual belief systems",<sup>38</sup> not to mention that elite

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<sup>34</sup> European Union, "Treaty of Lisbon," *Official Journal of the European Union* C306 (2007): 11.

<sup>35</sup> The Charter was officially proclaimed in Nice in 2000 and was previously incorporated into the Constitutional Treaty.

<sup>36</sup> European Union, "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union," *Official Journal of the European Union* C 303 (2007): 2.

<sup>37</sup> Dionysia Tamvaki, "The Copenhagen Criteria and the Evolution of Popular Consent to EU Norms: From Legality to Normative Justifiability in Poland and the Czech Republic," in *Spreading Democracy and the Rule of Law?: The Impact of EU Enlargement on the Rule of Law, Democracy and Constitutionalism in Post-Communist Legal Orders*, ed. Wojciech Sadurski, Adam Czarnota and Martin Krygier (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 154.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

perceptions regarding EU matters tend to differ from those of the lay people.<sup>39</sup> In fact, while carrying out this research, one of the difficulties with which I was faced was precisely the lack of materials concerning public opinion. Yet, in the words of Tamvaki, “if elite institutionalisation is not accompanied by gradual popular habituation [...] it is not hard to imagine how hard it will be for the national but also the supranational sphere”.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, important as they are, the EU socialisation tools such as the documents examined would not have a significant impact on the social reality, unless the institutionalised values are *perceived* as real by the public. Only if they become internalised could they reinforce the image of the EU as a civilian power, which is being put forward. Moreover, if a political identity is to emerge, as a basis for legitimisation of the EU, one of the conditions is for the European citizens to identify themselves with the values and principles adhered to by the community, and to refer to them in an emotional manner.<sup>41</sup> Only by being involved in such a discourse could they come to share, modify and reinterpret these values and principles.<sup>42</sup> From a constructivist perspective, it thus becomes evident that public opinion bears significant implications for the EU image.

As outlined in the beginning, I take Bulgaria (BG) as a case study, while I do not claim that the country is representative of the entire ‘periphery’; meanwhile, I operationalise the ‘centre’ as consisting of the six founding members of the Community (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Italy and Germany). This selection is mainly in response to a proposition presented by Schlenker and Fuchs, namely that the value orientations of the benchmark countries, representing the ‘Western civilization’, differ considerably from those of the Slavic-Orthodox civilization, characterising Bulgaria (while there are relatively small differences in comparison to the CEECs such as Poland for instance).<sup>43</sup> By taking the two farthest away variants within the Union, I seek to examine whether the fact that they belong to the same polity, in addition to being subjects to an assumed similar course of socialisation (i.e. the examined EU documents),

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, David Bailey, “Misperceiving Matters: Elite Ideas and the Failure of the European Constitution,” *Comparative European Politics* 6 (2008): 33-60.

<sup>40</sup> Tamvaki, “The Copenhagen Criteria and the Evolution of Popular Consent to EU Norms,” 166.

<sup>41</sup> Cerutti, “Why Political Identity and Legitimacy Matter in the European Union,” 6-12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Fuchs and Schlenker, “European Identity and the Legitimacy of the EU,” 16-17.

their citizens are on the path of convergence in terms of the image that they have of the European Union and the values that they associate with it.

### *'Weighing' the Eurobarometer*

The examination of public opinion across the member states is based solely on the EU official statistics database, namely the *Eurobarometer*,<sup>44</sup> and consequently is far from exhaustive, given that the issues of interest (the EU image and corresponding values) are not part of every report. Nevertheless, it provides a good starting point, especially since the phrasing of the questions and the methodological instruments are analogous across the countries. Additionally, the representative sample allows for a valuable comparison, in this case between Bulgaria on the one side, and the members of the 'core EU' on the other. Yet, because various *Eurobarometer* standard reports omit some of the relevant information, I only focus on the three most appropriate ones, namely surveys 62 (Autumn 2004),<sup>45</sup> 66 (Autumn 2006)<sup>46</sup> and 69 (Spring 2008). Moreover, as the reports do not display a specific indicator for the core EU (although there is an average for the EU25 and EU27), the averages for the six 'central' states are the result of my calculations. Furthermore, since in many cases people reply to the surveys in terms of practical matters (ex. associating the EU with bureaucracy), I only examine the references to the values and principles of the Union, although I am not arguing that the former are less significant for the image construction. Rather, the motivation behind this selection is to see which of the institutionalised values and principles (peace, democracy, rule of law, freedom, equality, solidarity, human dignity and respect for human rights) are internalised by the people and invoke a certain emotional attachment.

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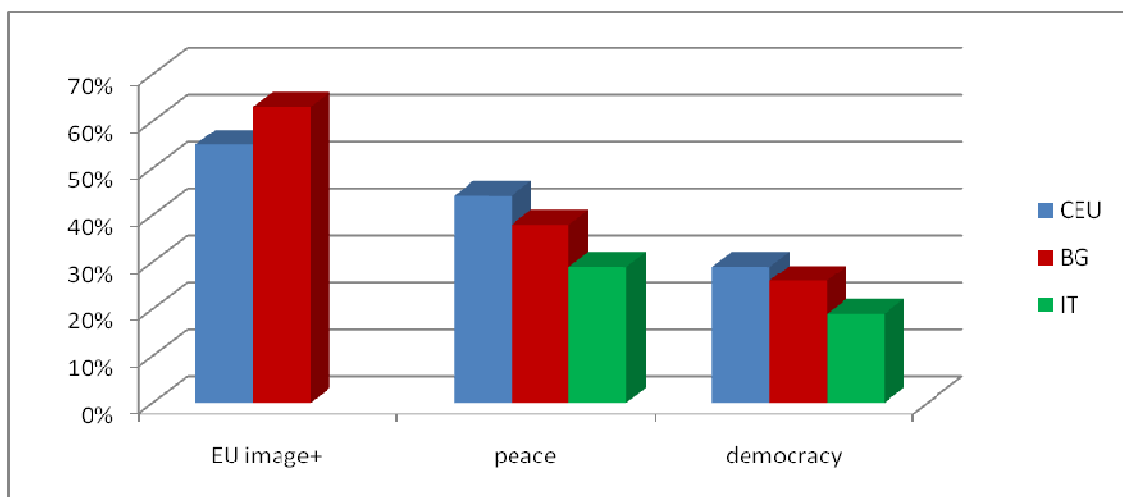
<sup>44</sup> European Commission, Public Opinion Analysis, "Eurobarometer Surveys," European commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/standard\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm) (accessed 2 May 2010).

<sup>45</sup> This is the first report featuring statistics from Bulgaria.

<sup>46</sup> Both *Eurobarometer* 62 and 66 are from a period when Bulgaria was still not a member of the EU.

### *Eurobarometer 62*

According to this survey, the image of the European Union was described as positive by 63% of the Bulgarians (BG) and 55% of the core EU (CEU) citizens. In answering the question “What does the EU mean to its citizens”, the overall most common reply concerned the freedom of movement and other practical matters (ex. bureaucracy, waste of money, etc.). In terms of the values and principles of the Union, there were only references to peace (BG: 38%; CEU: 44%) and democracy (BG: 26%; CEU: 29%), with Italy (IT) exhibiting relatively lower belief in the EU’s representation of these (29% and 19% respectively). Interestingly, there was also a significant difference between all the candidate states and the EU members in associating the Union with “economic prosperity”.



*Figure 1: Results Eurobarometer 62.*

### *Eurobarometer 66*

In this case, 63% of the Bulgarians had a positive image of the Union, while this was true for 48% of the CEU citizens. In terms of the “values that best represent the European Union”, the following were mentioned: human rights (BG: 48%; CEU: 43%, with IT exhibiting the lowest degree of agreement: 29%); peace (BG: 46%; CEU: 40%); democracy (BG: 15%; CEU: 39%); rule of law (BG: 28%; CEU: 27%, with 42% of agreement in the Netherlands [NL]); human dignity (BG: 50%; CEU: 14%); solidarity

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(BG: 16%; CEU: 19%); equality (BG: 13%; CEU: 12%); tolerance (BG: 13%; CEU: 10%); individual freedom (BG: 32%; CEU: 9%); It is important to point out that there was a distinction made between the values represented by the EU and the personal values of the citizens (although the two categories tend to overlap). Additionally, the report provides data for the “belief in shared values” among the EU citizens, with 62% support of the claim among the Bulgarians, and a rather imbalanced agreement in the CEU (from 34% in FR to 55% in IT), producing an average of 44%.

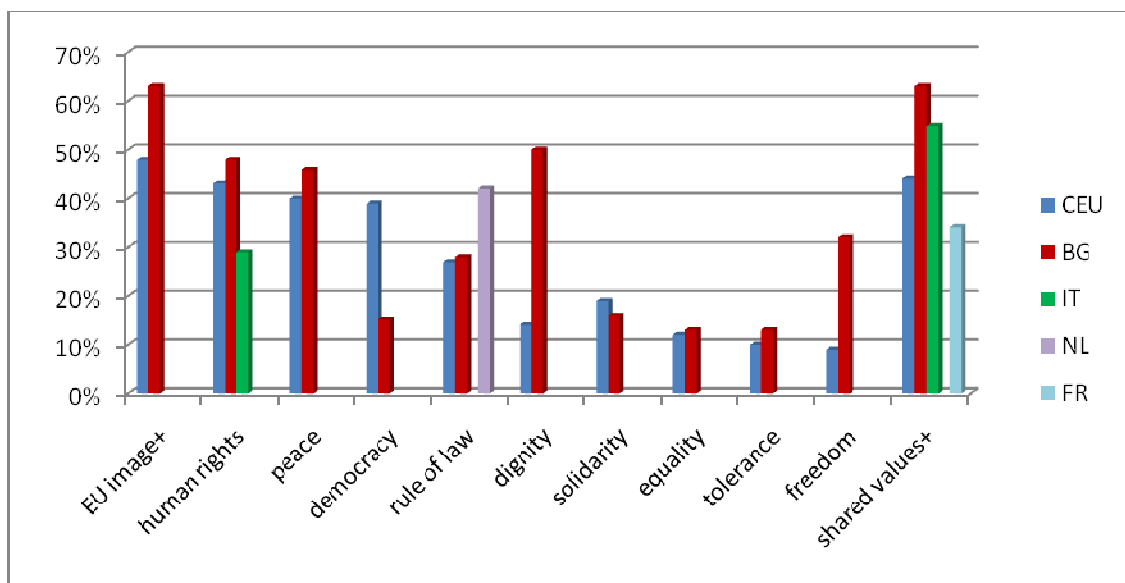
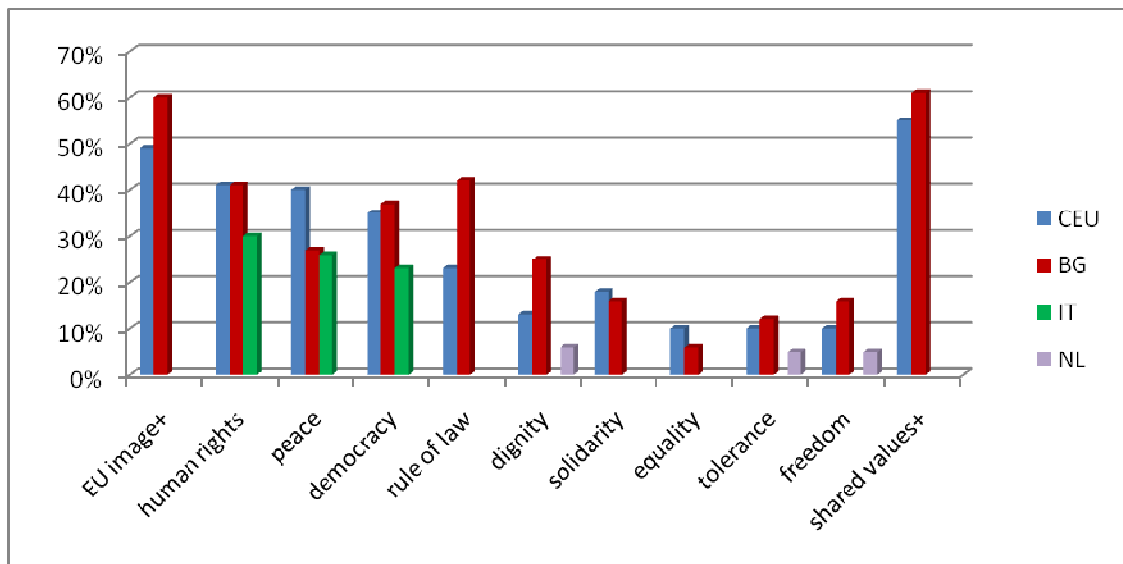


Figure 2: Results Eurobarometer 66.

#### *Eurobarometer 69*

This edition was divided in various subsections, including data pertaining to the “Values of the Europeans” and “The European Union and its citizens”. The former part begins with an explanation of the need for an analysis of the European values, given that the Union is often considered as simply a political and economic area. Nevertheless, since membership is open only to countries that adhere to these values and principles, it is stated that “values are therefore very much at the heart of the European project, which is

not simply the construction of a common market”.<sup>47</sup> Again, a distinction is made between the personal values of the citizens, and those associated with the Community, of which the following references occur: human rights (BG:41%; CEU: 41%, with 30% in IT); peace (BG: 27%; CEU: 40%, with 26% in IT); democracy (BG: 37%; CEU: 35%, with 23% in IT); rule of law (BG: 42%; CEU: 23%); solidarity (BG: 16%; CEU: 18%); human dignity (BG: 25%; CEU: 13%, with 6% in NL); equality (BG: 6%; CEU 10%); individual freedom (BG: 16%; CEU: 10%, with 5% in NL); tolerance (BG: 12%; CEU: 10%, with 5% in NL). In terms of the belief in shared values, 61% of the Bulgarians agree with such a suggestion, while the average for the CEU members comes to 55%, but this time a lot more evenly distributed among its citizens. Then, according to the part entitled “The European Union and its citizens”, the agreement to a positive image of the EU was quite similar to the one reported in previous years (BG: 60%; CEU: 49%). In answer to “What the Union means to its citizens”, only two value-based references were present: peace (BG: 27%; CEU: 26%, with an imbalanced distribution from 15% in IT to 43% in NL) and democracy (BG: 27%; CEU: 21%).



*Figure 3: Results Eurobarometer 69.*

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, Directorate General for Communication, *Eurobarometer 69* “Public Opinion in the European Union,” November 2008, 5, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_en.htm).

### *Analysis*

Firstly, it must be clarified that there is other data available, which could be useful for research concerning the image of the EU, as for example the importance of the media, the feelings toward the supranational institutions (for example, hope, trust, etc.) and the economic situation in the Union, but for the purposes of the paper I have selected only the explicit references to the image and the values. Additionally, the *Eurobarometer* often offers a breakdown of the results pertaining to various age and education level categories within each member state, but I disregard these variables and illustrate only the averages for BG and CEU.

When it comes to the “image of the EU”, it is quite apparent that this concept does not tell us much about the actual feelings of the citizens except for whether it is positive, negative or neutral, although it should be noted that an overall decrease in the positive feelings is observed. This is especially true for the CEU and more so after 2004 (-7 points), which could lead to a hypothesis that the trend is correlated with the Eastern Enlargement. Similarly however, there is a slight decrease in the positive evaluation by Bulgarians, which might be explained by the idea that the prospect of inclusion provokes positive feelings (among the candidate states),<sup>48</sup> while once part of the Community, the experiences and perceptions are analogical across the centre and the periphery. Also, Bee’s proposition of a sequence in the EU self-representation (from economic outputs, to symbols, to values)<sup>49</sup> is consistent with the fact that in the earlier reports there are more references to the symbols associated with the EU (for example, questions concerning the flag and the hymn), while in the later ones the focus is on the values and principles. Following Cerutti<sup>50</sup>, the motivation underlying this analysis could be related to the civil society-based self-understanding and political identity, required for the legitimization of the Union. Although there is extensive data on the economic aspect of the EU image throughout the period 2004-2008, the fact that associations with “economic prosperity” are more often exhibited by newer Member States might imply that the trend observed by Bee is delayed in the periphery due to its more recent inclusion in the Community. On the

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<sup>48</sup> Laurstin, “The European Public Sphere and the Social Imaginary of the ‘New Europe’,” 406.

<sup>49</sup> Cristiano Bee, “The ‘Institutionally Constructed’ European Identity,” 446.

<sup>50</sup> Cerutti, “Why Political Identity and Legitimacy Matter in the European Union”.



other hand, as illustrated in *Eurobarometer* 69, there seems to be support for Ingleheart's post-materialist theory, predicting that citizens in wealthier countries would be more concerned about values and subjective well-being, rather than about material variables such as the economic situation within the Union.<sup>51</sup>

Looking at the values and principles associated with the EU, peace and democracy come up in all of the reports; these are characterised by an overall similar degree of agreement in BG and the CEU, although the distance of the results interchanges across time and between the concepts. It is interesting to point out that in many cases, Italian citizens tend to be more similar to the Bulgarians than to the other citizens of the centre in terms of their understanding of what the EU stands for. In this case then, the hypothesis by Fuchs' and Schlenker's concerning the value discrepancy between the benchmark member states and Slavic-Orthodox countries<sup>52</sup> is not necessarily verified. Typically for a neo-medieval empire, diversity does exist both between the centre and the periphery, and among the citizens of the two areas. What is important here, however, is that in general BG and CEU citizens perceive similar representations of the Union. Thus for example, associating the EU with human rights is an aspect of the image that comes up first on the list for all member states, with no significant differences in the extent to which there is agreement (approximately 40%). On the other hand, BG citizens score higher on the agreement scale concerning the EU embodiment of the rule of law and respect for human dignity; they are also slightly more inclined to support associations of the Union with values such as tolerance and individual freedom. This then supports Zielonka's argument that "peripheral member states often have more motivation to assimilate into the norms",<sup>53</sup> most likely in order to be perceived as truly belonging to the polity after a long period of exclusion. Nevertheless, both the centre and the periphery show evidence of internalisation of the values and principles institutionalised by the EU. This is consistent with the notion that a certain kind of authority (in this case the legal texts examined earlier) could construct a social reality<sup>54</sup> since the ideas that were represented (i.e. the

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<sup>51</sup> European Commission, Directorate General for Communication, *Eurobarometer* 69, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Fuchs and Schlenker, "European Identity and the Legitimacy of the EU," 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Zielonka, *Europe as Empire*, 82.

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall ed., "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE, 1997), 49.

values and principles) become meaningful with reference to the “nodal point” (i.e. the European Union) and are consequently applied by the people, thereby reinforcing the image of the EU as a civilian power. That is to say, the institutionalised values and principles become an influential force with respect to the image of the Community. Thus, even if there are policies which are inconsistent (or not yet consistent) with the EU’s self-representation, if the underlying ideas have been internalised, they could remain powerful factors for the image. Then, the concept of “empty signifier” (referring to the hegemony of whatever is absent)<sup>55</sup> becomes a useful tool for understanding why people in a peripheral state such as Bulgaria exhibited a significant support for the association of the EU with freedom<sup>56</sup> (i.e. hegemony of the institutionalised value), despite the fact that even after becoming European citizens, they were *not* immediately *free* to work everywhere within the Community<sup>57</sup> (i.e. absence of the value-corresponding policy).

Meanwhile, although the institutionalisation of European values could be said to provide the basis for the image construction of the EU, this is not to say the influence of these is only limited to the context of the legal documents. Rather, the internalised ideas by the people have a further constructive effect, by means of the corresponding discussion. Therefore, it is possible to imagine how the discursive references among the people from both the periphery and the centre reinforce the image of the Community and the European values, in addition to shaping (and reacting to) the media representations. Moreover, the *Eurobarometer* is in itself a sort of a socialising tool in that it not only reflects public opinion, but also confines it. By giving a set of options (i.e. different values, principles and practical matters concerning the EU), to which the citizens can agree or disagree (although they are allowed to give their own opinions labelled as “other”), it has a discursive impact on the construction of the image within the public sphere. Thus for example, people are not only faced with the institutionalised European values from which they are to choose the ones that “best represent the European Union”, but it is also the same set of possibilities, which supposedly characterise their own

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<sup>55</sup> Howarth and Stavrakakis eds., “Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis,” 9.

<sup>56</sup> According to the Constitutional Treaty it is one of the founding values of the EU.

<sup>57</sup> European Union, “Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union,” *Official Journal of the European Union* L 157 (2005): 278-281.

personal values. In consequence, we observe a great overlap between the citizens' values, and the ones associated with the Community. Undoubtedly, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the two sets of replies would be completely different otherwise, but I would like to propose one factor, which might contribute to the construction of the EU image in a way that is in accordance with the personal values of the citizens. Analogically, the question concerning the extent to which people believe in the common values of the Community provokes people to *think* in terms of such commonality, which in turn predisposes for the reconstruction of their social reality. Certainly, one should not disregard the influence of the national elites in the socialisation process, especially since the adherence to the examined values is one of the conditions for EU membership. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that while in 2006 the degree of agreement to the commonality of values was significantly different both between the periphery and the centre, and among the citizens of the core EU, the 2008 report implies a tendency of convergence between the areas and an overall increase of the support for such a suggestion.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the paper has been to explore the implicit aspect of the EU image, by looking at the values and principles (instead of the policies) on which it is based. In terms of the self-understanding of the Community, these have been largely influenced by significant EU articles, such as the ones comprising the Copenhagen criteria, the Constitutional Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon. For the most part, these foundations have been explored from a normative perspective emphasising the influence of the main fifteen EU members on the twelve newer member states. Although I am not denying the impact of the former on the latter, I have attempted to bring attention to the more neglected aspect of the EU image construction, namely the interaction between the centre and the periphery, and their mutually-constitutive (self) representations and ideas. Therefore, it was suggested that the presence (and the later inclusion) of the candidate countries in relation to which the member states had to define themselves, encouraged a representation of the EU as a civilian power, based on values and principles such as peace, democracy, rule of law and

human rights. On the state level, the compliance with the legal documents allowed for the strengthening of this image, while on the public level the institutionalisation of the European values and principles could be seen as having a discursive power in the form of a socialisation process. Thus, upon examining the public opinion in a peripheral country like Bulgaria and comparing it to the central EU, analogous pattern of value internalisation has been observed. One of the implications of the implied commonality in the civic value system of the European citizens would concern their political identity, which has been suggested as a precondition for the legitimisation of the EU.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the emergence of the EU (internal) image could be considered the result of a loop, where the Union's self-representations by means of the particular value articulations affect in a similar manner the citizens across the "neo-medieval empire". In turn, their combined discursive references to the already institutionalised values, feed back to the Community's self-understanding, which is then further reinforced. Hence, I have not argued for a causal relationship, but rather have attempted to emphasise the power of the ideas, (supposedly) pertaining to, and thereby associated with the Community. In this sense, the image of the EU is not meaningful *per se*; instead, its meaning is elaborated via its self-representations, the increasing value-based references that we confer to it, and the context within which both the centre and the periphery play a role in these discursive processes.

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<sup>58</sup> Cerutti, "Why Political Identity and Legitimacy Matter in the European Union".

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